

Midway Flag

organizing the settlers into defined military units for greater security. On June 26, 1866, they organized the militia of Wasatch County and held an inspection drill at Heberville, where a fort had also been recently constructed. Major Witt of Heberville was placed in command of the District which had three battalions--one of cavalry and two of infantry--to be known as the Wasatch Military District. Sidney Epperson and John Hamilton were appointed Majors over Fort Midway, with John Watkins as bugler.

Fort Midway was conducted under military law, having officers and picket patrol, with men arising to assigned duty at the call of the bugle. The militia was in complete charge of all activities necessary for the welfare and general good of the community.

With the organization of the Military District and the approaching completion of the Fort Midway settlement, Sidney Epperson was concerned about the lack of availability of an American Flag of "colors" to be flown at Fort Midway and to be used on campaign against the indians. Realizing the importance of having a suitable flag for the battalion and Fort Midway use, Mary Jane Robey Epperson, Sidney's Wife, commenced the construction of a large American flag. The material for the flag came from bedsheets, which were hand dyed and sewn. When completed, the flag contained less than the standard 13 stripes of red and blue and had only 18 of the 34 stars typical to the American Flag utilized throughout the Civil War years from 1861 to 1865--an omission necessitat-

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ed due to the exigencies of time, material and circumstances.

When completed, the flag was utilized by the Midway Battalion throughout the Blackhawk Indian War, which ended in 1867 after talks between the Indians and Mormon leaders occurred at Mount Pleasant in Sanpete County. At that time, most of the

Ute Indians were persuaded to settle on a reservation in the Uintah Basin. Chief Tabby, another Ute leader in the late summer of 1867, brought tribe members to the Heber Valley, and after smoking the peace pipe with community leaders, entered into a peace agreement. With peace having been declared, the settlers put on a tremendous feast for the Indians and sent them away with gifts including clothing, blankets and hats.

The Blackhawk War lasted for two years and resulted in the

death of fifty settlers and resulted in property loss to the settlers of more than \$1,000,000.00. Fortunately, Fort Midway was never attacked during the Blackhawk War. When it was time to disband, most of the settlers decided to remain near Fort Midway. The old fort location was preserved by the town as a public square and the upper and lower settlements were never rebuilt.

Sidney H. Epperson, in 1872, built a home across the street from the town square, which is now owned and occupied by Winona Epperson. With the disbanding of the fort, the old eighteen star American Flag remained in the possession of Sidney H. Epperson until his death in 1913. Prior to his death, it was carried in special parades and events in Midway and Heber.

Sid Epperson, a grandson of Sidney H. Epperson, carried the old flag on horseback from 1954 through 1960 at the Midway Harvest Festival, later called Swiss Days. The flag remained in the Sidney H. Epperson home until 1967 when Dan and Mollie the last surviving children of Sidney H. Epperson, entrusted the flag to Lethe Coleman Tathge to ensure its preservation. Since

1967 the flag has remained on the second floor of the Midway Town Hall, largely ignored and forgotten.

There are many individuals still residing in the Heber Valley who are fourth-, fifth-, or sixth-generation descendants of the early settlers who "forted in" at Midway during the Blackhawk War. The old fort Midway Flag, now 118 years old,

symbolizes the courage and community spirit of those first

inhabitants of Wasatch County, and it would seem appropriate to make more readily available for public display the "Old Fort Midway Flag" at such special occasions as Swiss Days, where this community celebrates and gives thought to its rich heritage and history.

Come On Out and Enjoy Swiss Days

when the Peter Shirts, Ephraim Hanks, Jno Hanks, and Riggs families arrived in the valley and settled some four miles above the first colony on Snake Creek. This upper settlement later came to be known as Mound City, presumably having been named by John Huber. After 1860 numerous other families arrived, locating on the west side of the Heber Valley and up and down Snake Creek for four miles. Sidney H. Epperson was appointed presiding Elder over the colonists on June 26, 1862, and by 1864 it is estimated that fifty-six families were members of the two settlements.

Giving heed to Brigham Young decree, the settlers on the western half of the Heber Valley agreed in principle that they should band together in one location to build a fort for mutual protection and security. However, the upper settlement colonists the lower settlement colonists did not feel like moving to the upper settlement.

In the spring of 1866, under the direction of presiding Elder Sidney H. Epperson, a compromise location was selected halfway between the two settlements and they commenced to "fort in". The name Fort Sidney was reportedly first suggested in honor of their leader and met with unanimous approval, but Sidney said, "No,

we'll call it Midway."

The first step in laying out the fort and settlement was the survey of the townsite. John Huber and Sidney Epperson carried the tape, Mark Smith and Attewall Wootton the pegs, and within a few days Midway was laid out in large blocks thirty-two rods square, with a Main Street six rods wide and side streets four rods in width. A public square where the fort settlement was to be placed was set aside in the center of the new town site, and within a matter of weeks, through a tremendous community effort, seventy-five primitive dirt roofed log cabins were constructed surrounding the central square. Some cabins abutted each other, while in some instances strong panels of upright posts made palisades

between cabins built slightly apart, forming an impregnable wall around the square. Small rear windows were to serve as portholes in case of attack. The inner six acres of the square were enclosed with a heavy pole fence, typical of the old pioneers, which was used as a corral for the protection of the livestock at night.

As Fort Midway was nearing completion, Major General Robert T. Burton and his Chief of Staff, Colonel D. J. Ross of Salt Lake City, made a trip to the valley for the purpose of